

A Veterinary Student's Contribution to the History of African-American DVM Education

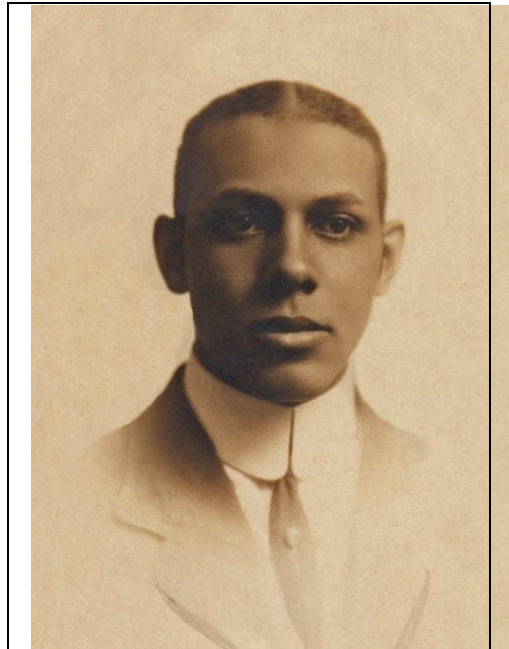
Editor's Note: The first two African-American veterinarians in the United States graduated from Harvard (1889) and the University of Pennsylvania (1907).¹ It is unclear how many more African-American veterinarians graduated in that era, though Kansas State University had a graduate in 1912,² and there were apparently three early veterinarians at Tuskegee circa 1910.³

While a veterinary student at Cornell (2009-2013), Dr. Jennifer Morrissey took an interest in the history of early African-American veterinary students at Cornell. She suspected that the previously-accepted university reports failed to accurately identify some of the black students who graduated in the early years, prior to the well-known Aubrey Robinson in 1920. With a determination and yearning for clues that was really quite remarkable, she deciphered class photos with tenacity, corresponded with experts in the field, and spent many hours in Cornell's Kroch Library. Morrissey was eventually able to identify six black graduates between 1910 and 1919. She was proudly able to verify that Cornell's contribution to educating African-American veterinarians this early in the profession's history was unprecedented.

Donald F. Smith

By Dr. Jennifer Morrissey (Guest Author)
February 6, 2014

Kirksey L. Curd, a native of Kentucky, was Cornell's first African-American veterinary graduate. After receiving his DVM in 1912, he entered the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania and spent the remainder of his professional career as a practicing physician at the Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital in Philadelphia.



Dr. Kirksey L. Curd, 1912, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

The next graduate, Garret Singleton '14, was an Ithaca native whose mother was famous for creating a haven for black students in her house near the Cornell campus.⁴ After graduation, he had several jobs in regulatory medicine, including working for the Department of Health in Los Angeles. He eventually opened a small animal clinic in Venice, CA, and was also an Assistant Humane Officer in the area. A musician, he was a member of a local symphony orchestra.



Dr. Garret Singleton, 1914, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

Ray Waller grew up in Brooklyn, New York, the son of Owen M. Waller Sr., MD, one of the founders of the NAACP. He entered Cornell in 1914, and was followed a year later by his brother, Owen Jr. Dr. Ray Benson Potter Waller '17. He practiced veterinary medicine in Harlem, NY, and also worked at the New York City Department of Health.



Dr. Ray B.P. Waller, 1917, Graduation Photo
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

Owen Waller Jr., was one of three African-American students in his Class of 1918. The three represented the largest number of male African-American veterinary students ever to graduate from Cornell in a single year. Owen was a staunch supporter of the right of black students to participate in varsity athletics. One of his influential essays was entitled, "The Colored Man as an Athlete".



Class of 1918 with three African-American graduates highlighted
(© New York State Veterinary College, Cornell University)

One of the reasons Owen was so interested in athletics was that his classmates, W. H. Seabrook (an Ithaca native) and Abram J. Jackson Jr., were stars in baseball and track. All three men had successful veterinary careers, Drs. Waller and Seabrook in private practices in Brooklyn, and Dr. Jackson with the federal meat inspection service.

Editorial Epilogue: The last African-American to enter Cornell's veterinary college during the decade was Aubrey E. Robinson Sr. who graduated in 1920 and whose story has been told elsewhere in this series.⁵ Sadly, Cornell's contribution to educating African-Americans waned in the ensuing decades. Kansas State University and others took the lead, making it truly a multi-institutional awakening, but centered at Kansas State University and other colleges in the Midwest.⁶

Donald F. Smith

¹ Smith, Donald F. 150th Anniversary of Veterinary Education and the Veterinary Profession in North America: Part 2, 1940-1970. *J Vet Med Educ* 38(1), 2011.

² Smith, Donald F. and Howard Erickson, African-American Veterinary Students at Kansas State University (1910-1950). *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. June 2, 2013.

³ Adams, Eugene W. The Legacy. History of the Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine. (Tuskegee: The Media Center Press, Tuskegee University, 1995), 7.

⁴ At 411 East State St., Ithaca

⁵ Smith, Donald F. The Robinsons: Father and Son African-American Veterinarians. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. January 29, 2014.

⁶ Smith and Erickson, African-American Veterinary Students at Kansas State University (1910-1950). *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. June 2, 2013.

KEYWORDS:

African-American Veterinarians
Cornell University
Tuskegee University
Kirksey Curd
Garret Singleton
Ray Waller
Owen Waller
W.H. Seabrook
Abram F. Jackson, Jr.
Aubrey E. Robinson, Sr.
Kansas State University

TOPIC:

African-American veterinarians

LEADING QUESTION:

What veterinary college was the first to graduate several African-American veterinarians in one decade?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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